It will readily be recalled that there have been many trivial ways adopted in an effort to keep the Fast of Lent without keeping it. Christians have given up candy or smoking or the theater or ice cream or what not. Such abstinence often becomes a substitute for the real Fast of Lent instead of being a natural accompaniment of this fast. Too often, also, these abstinences have been made a matter of discussion and self-advertising. "My, how I have developed in self-control" is read on the face of many a trivial abstainer. But where does the good God come into the picture? No, the Fast of Lent must be God-centered and not self-centered. This it will be if he who fasts does so as a privilege of doing penance for his sins, for penance is godly sorrow which alone can issue in heavenly joy.

There is a tendency in these times to put forth a soft and easy religion and to do so under the protection of a lie. Religious leaders who seek popularity are forever saying that Lent should be a positive season, not a negative one, and that we should "take on," not "give up." True, we should take on virtues, but there will not be room for them until we give up sins. It is a matter of experience that we shall never give up sins until we do penance for them. Thus let us welcome the Fast of Lent as a season of forty days in which we become accustomed to doing penance for our sins.

This does not mean that we shall not accom-

pany our fasting with the other two notable duties set forth by our blessed Lord, namely, prayer and almsgiving. We shall indeed go to Mass more often, do more spiritual reading, meditate more on the revelation of God's love, make more confessions and receive more communions, and offer more works of mercy to our neighbors. We shall indeed withdraw more from the world that we may have the time and energy for more prayer and more almsgiving. But we shall miss the observance of Lent if we fail to fast and thereby to do penance for our sins because Lent is a season of fasting. What a blessed Lent it will be for each Catholic Christian if he fasts in order that he may do penance for his sins and thereby honestly unite himself with the Friend of sinners, the Lamb of Calvary. Can Lent really mean anything in any other way?

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A Catholic Keeps Lent

By Grieg Taber

THE happiest Catholic is the honest Catholic. He is the genuine Catholic who is honest with his own conscience, honest in his dealings with his fellows and honest in his efforts at union with his God. Such a Catholic welcomes year by year the opportunity to observe another season of Lent. He does not mutter, "Oh, Lent is here again with its attendant gloom. Now all the joy will disappear from my religion." He rather exclaims, "Welcome, blessed season of Lent! Great demands will be made on my honesty but as I fulfill these demands my spiritual happiness will increase."

What is Lent? Lent is a season of forty days of doing penance, which season Holy Church gives her children as their best sort of preparation for the keeping of the Queen of Feasts,—Easter Day. It is a season in which the Church bids her members offer up forty days of penance as a sacrifice of propitiation to the offended Love of

God. It is a season which recalls how in the wastes of the desert our blessed Lord, though free from any stain of sin, underwent forty days of fasting whereby He did penance for the sins of all mankind. He performed this penance to appease the majesty of God the Father who had been offended by the sins of His children and to give us an example for doing penance for our sins. Thus in the wilderness the Incarnate Son of God suffered for the sins of the world, prefiguring the suffering which He would gladly accomplish in His Sacrifice on Calvary's Cross and reminding us that sins must be suffered for and grieved over. His love proclaimed His willingness to suffer on our behalf and His justice proclaimed His desire that we should suffer in some measure for our own sins. And why should we not? Why should we not do penance for our sins?

What is penance? It concerns both the soul and the body. It is contrition of the soul and it is mortification of the body. The soul wills the sins that we mortals commit and the body frequently cooperates in the commission of those sins. Now the contrition, or godly sorrow, of the soul takes the form of resolutions to give up this, that, or the other sin, grief over sins already committed, hatred of sin as an offense against the love of God and willingness to avoid the occasions of sin. As an accompaniment to this contrition of the soul there is the mortification of the body which may best be attained by fasting and abstinence. In the desert wilderness our blessed Lord in His divine soul grieved over our

sins and hated them because they were an offense against the Father's love, yet He went further and by fasting mortified His body as a foretaste of the expiation which He would make for the sins of the whole world on the Cross.

FASTING

Throughout the world's history fasting has always been a mark of sorrow for shortcomings. Our blessed Lord accepted this universal method of expressing sorrow for sin and enjoined fasting upon His followers as the best way of doing penance for sins. And true to her Lord who set forth fasting as one of the three great duties, the Church Catholic has ruled that fasting should be a part of every Christian's plan of living. Now that branch of the Church Catholic to which we belong, the Episcopal Church, has in her Book of Common Prayer a Table of Fasts, in which Table the forty days of Lent are mentioned as "days on which the Church requires such a measure of abstinence as is more especially suited to extraordinary acts and exercises of devotion."

From earliest Christian times to the present there have been various and sundry ways of carrying out the obligation of fasting in the several sections of the Church Catholic. The picture is a confused one, so much so that only as recently as 1943 the Joint Committee on Discipline of the Clerical Union for the Maintenance and Defense of Catholic Principles and the American Church Union suggested that "each Wednesday and Fri-

day in Lent are to be days of abstinence from flesh meat and that on all days in Lent except Sunday the ordinary rule of one full meal, one half meal and a slight repast is to be followed." The Committee has further suggested that on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday the faithful will go beyond this minimum rule.

In simple language this means that Anglican Catholics (and we hope many other Episcopalians) will fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday to the extent of limiting themselves to black coffee and dry toast in the morning, with no other nourishment until the evening meal; and that on the other days of Lent they will fast to the extent of limiting themselves to a slight breakfast, a simple one-course luncheon and a normal full meal only at dinner. (Of course dinner could take the place of luncheon and then a simple one course supper would take the place of dinner.) Dispensations from the rules of fasting and abstinence can come only from the diocesan Bishop, or the local pastor, or the confessor in the proper exercise of his office. Moral theologians are agreed that all under the age of seven are excused from the rules of abstinence and that the rules of fasting (except the fast before the reception of Holy Communion) are not held to bind strictly before the age of twenty-one nor after the fifty-ninth birthday. The sick and infirm, expectant mothers, and those engaged in extraordinarily heavy labor are of necessity excused from fasting and abstinence. Most of us, thank God, are privileged to keep the Fast of Lent!